MARVEL
021
SPURRIER
WALKER
DEERING
TARTAGLIA
STAR WARS™
DOCTOR APHRA

THE CATASTROPHE CON
Part II

Rogue archaeologist Doctor Aphra's exploits in blackmailed servitude to the droid crime lord Triple-Zero have landed her in Imperial custody! Separated from her latest fling, Inspector Magna Tolvan, and stuck in Accresker Jail, Aphra and her fellow inmates are nothing more than expendable troops for the Empire.

The strange appearance of a ghostly entity has dashed Aphra's escape plan, and the good doctor struggles to resist the warden's torturous interrogations about what's been transpiring in the jail.

And to make matters worse, a certain angry ex-flame from Aphra's troubled past might just be back in the picture....

SI SPURRIER
Writer

KEV WALKER
Pencils

MARC DEERING
Inks

JAVA TARTAGLIA
Colors

VC's JOE CARAMAGNA
Letterer

ASHLEY WITTER
Cover Artist

TOM GRONEMAN
Assistant Editor

HEATHER ANTOS & MARK PANICCIA
Editors

C.B. CEBULSKI
Editor In Chief

JOE QUESADA
Chief Creative Officer

DAN BUCKLEY
President

Very Special Thanks - KIERON GILLEN

For Lucasfilm:
Assistant Editor NICK MARTINO
Senior Editor ROBERT SIMPSON
Executive Editor JENNIFER HEDDLE
Creative Director MICHAEL SIGLAIN
Lucasfilm Story Group JAMES WAUGH, LELAND CHEE, MATT MARTIN

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Nowhere Special (3rd Moon). Outer Rim.

YOU.

SANA STARROS? YOU'RE, UH...

YOU'RE LOOKING AT A STATIC CAPTURED IMAGE HERE. THIS ISN'T ME.

...ALTHOUGH-- WAIT, ARE YOU SAYING YOU RECOGNIZE THIS PERSON?

...WHO IS THIS?

Lucrehulk Prime: Rebel Flight School.

MY NAME IS GENERAL HERA SYNDULLA.

THE REBEL ALLIANCE HAS A JOB FOR YOU.

WE RECEIVED THE HOLO IMAGE YESTERDAY, FROM A DROID LOST DURING A ***FLEET ENGAGEMENT.***

THE ***WOMAN*** IN THE PICTURE-- WELL, SHE'S ATTEMPTING TO ***RANSOM*** SOME CRITICAL ***INTEL*** AT A LUDICROUS PRICE.

WE'D ***REALLY*** LIKE TO SPEAK TO HER.

MILITARY EXTORTION, HUH? GUESS SHE'S GOIN' UP IN THE WORLD.

COULDN'T HAPPEN TO A NICER ***TRASH WORM.*** WHAT'S THIS GOT TO DO WITH ***ME?***

*SHE APPEARS TO BE SERVING IN SOME KIND OF-- **CONVICT ARMY...***

*WE **NEED** THAT INTEL. FRANKLY? IT'LL BE CHEAPER TO **MAKE** HER UNLOCK IT THAN TO PAY THE RANSOM.*

*NOT TO MENTION A WHOLE LOT MORE **SATISFYING.***

*SO WE THOUGHT, WHO BETTER TO SMUGGLE A **TOXIC OBJECT** OUT OF A **HOSTILE SCENARIO--***

*--THAN THE BEST **SMUGGLER** IN THE GALAXY?*

HUH. FLATTERY'S ***NICE,*** LADY.

"BUT ***MONEY'S*** NICER."

Accresker Jail.

HI. IT'S, UH...IT'S ***ME.*** IT'S ***APHRA.*** DID YOU ***MISS*** ME?

*I EXPECTED YOU TO BE **OUT** BY NOW.*

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YEAH--ME TOO. THERE'S, AH...BEEN A SNAG. I KINDA NEED YOUR HELP.
YOU KNOW THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE.

I AM SO, SO SORRY.
SORRY? WHY?

DARTH VADER IS ENGAGED IN A SECRET CONSPIRACY TO REPLACE THE EMPEROR, USING THE SAME FORCE-SENSITIVE KID WHO DESTROYED THE DEATH STAR.
MY CAPTORS ARE ESCALATING THEIR INTERROGATIONS. I CAN'T KEEP THIS SECRET FOR LONG.

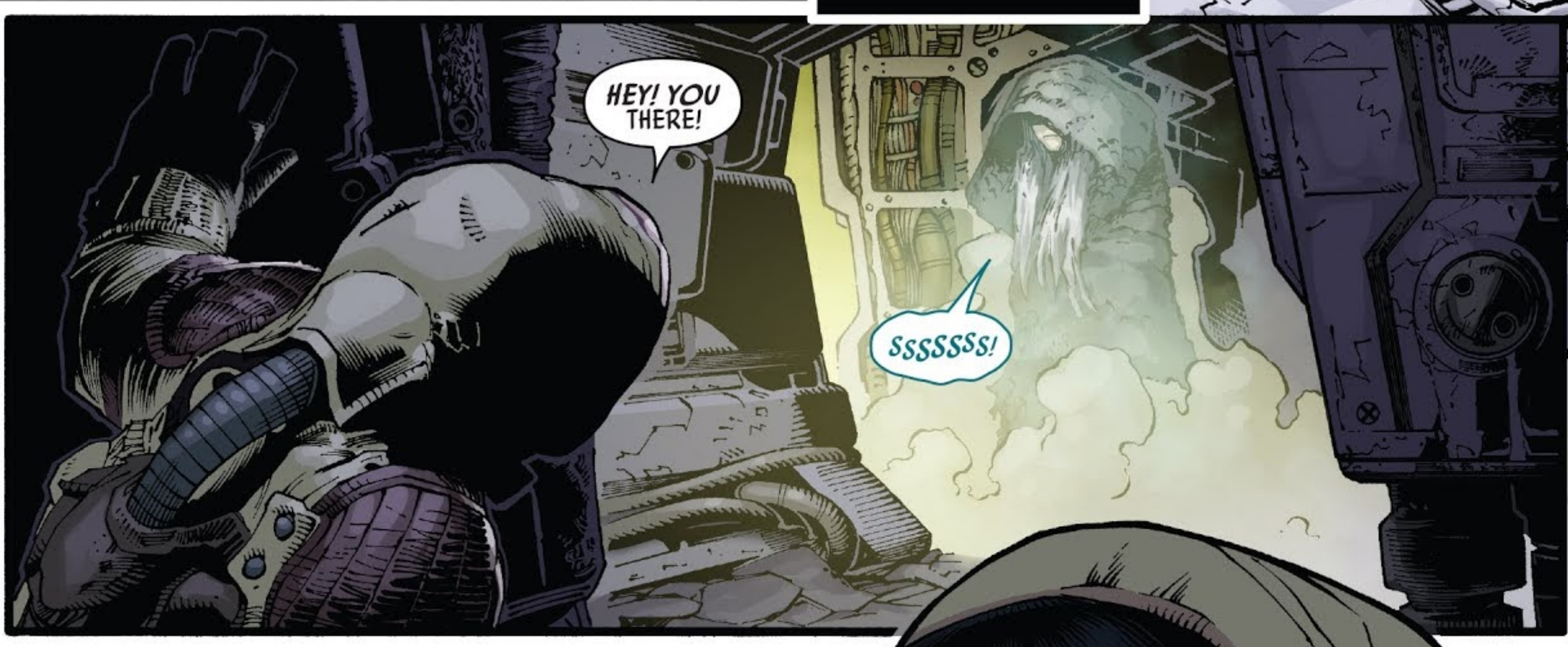
THEY'LL RUN IT UP THE POLE, AND THEN VADER WILL COME FOR ME. W-WITH STABBING AND LASER BEAMS AND THE CLEANSING FIRE OF A BILLION SUNS.
W-W-WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS?

BECAUSE ONCE THEY'RE THROUGH WITH QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT I KNOW, THE NEXT THING THEY ASK WILL BE VERY SIMPLE.

Coruscant.
"WHO ELSE HAVE YOU TOLD?"
YOU...
YOU UTTER...TOTAL... UNBELIEVABLE B--
I'M SORRY, TOLVAN. I'M SO SORRY. BUT... PLEASE?
FOR BOTH OUR SAKES...

"...COME GET ME."
UNAUTHORIZED TRANSMISSION!
UNAUTHORIZED TRANSMISSION! CONFISCATE ALL EQUIPMENT!

...HEY.


HEY! YOU THERE!
SSSSSSS!

L-LOPSET!
LOPSET YAS, YOU IN YOUR BERTH? GET OUT HERE! DID YOU SEE ANYTHING W--

--WEIRD.
AAH! AAAH! AAAAAH!
THEEEEERE WE GO...
CLIK ZZK
I-IT JUST... IT JUST CAME DOWN! IT CAME DOWN ALL ON ITS OWN!
HEY, BE CALM--IT'S FINE. YOU'RE SAFE.
ALSO, YOU OWE ME AGAIN.
TH-THIS PLACE...THE OLD-TIMERS HAVE ALL THESE--THESE STORIES! I D-DIDN'T WANNA BELIEVE IT, BUT--I SEEN SOME THINGS...

I SEEN SENSOR READINGS FOR STUFF THAT AIN'T *THERE*.

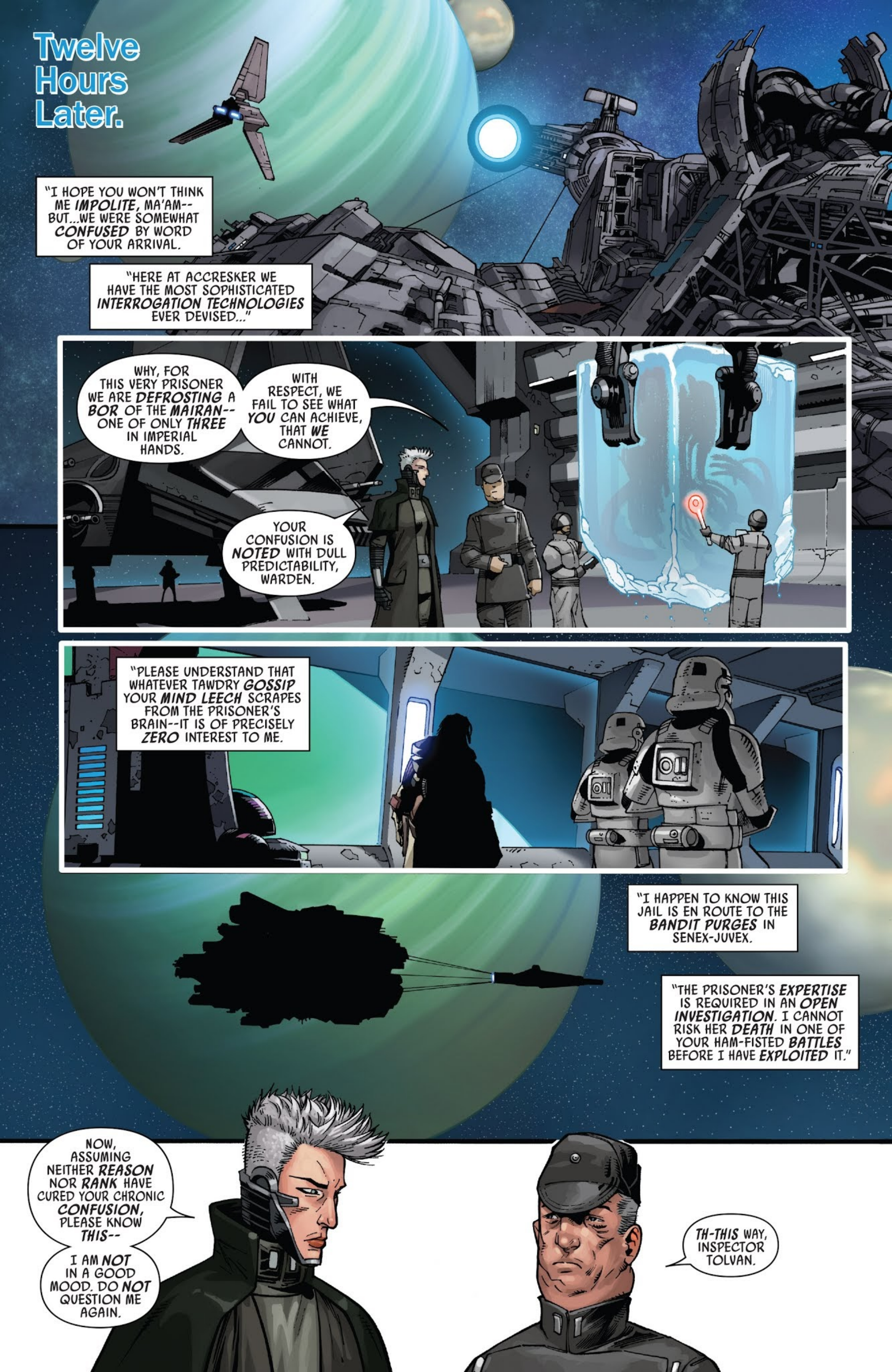
I SEEN *BOARDING-SPIKES* CUT A PERP IN HALF, A-AND *POWER COUPLERS* FRY GUYS TO DUST WHEN THERE'S NO POWER...

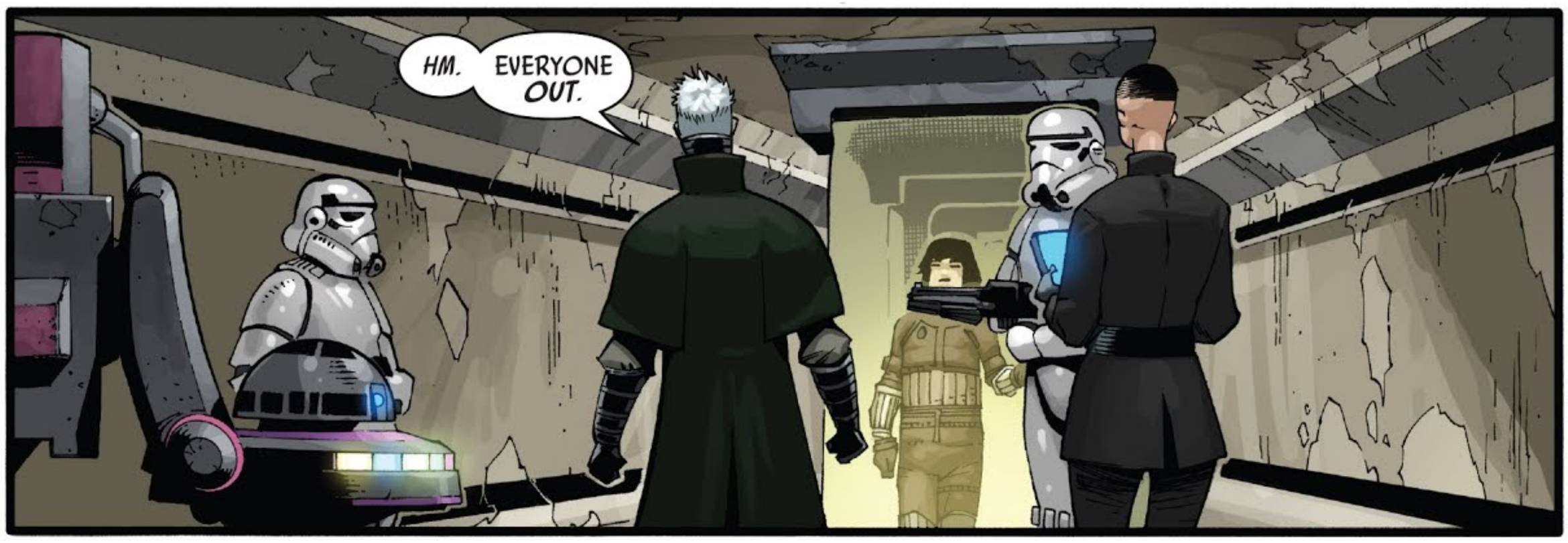
EVERY NIGHT I *DREAM* ABOUT--ABOUT *JUSTICE* AND *WICKEDNESS*, A-AND *SWORDS* MADE ALL OF *LIGHT*, A-AND JUST YESTERDAY THAT *RESTRAINING BOLT* ON YOUR PET *HUB-DROID* MOVED ALL ON ITS OWN.

I THINK THE OLD CONS ARE *RIGHT*. I THINK... I THINK...

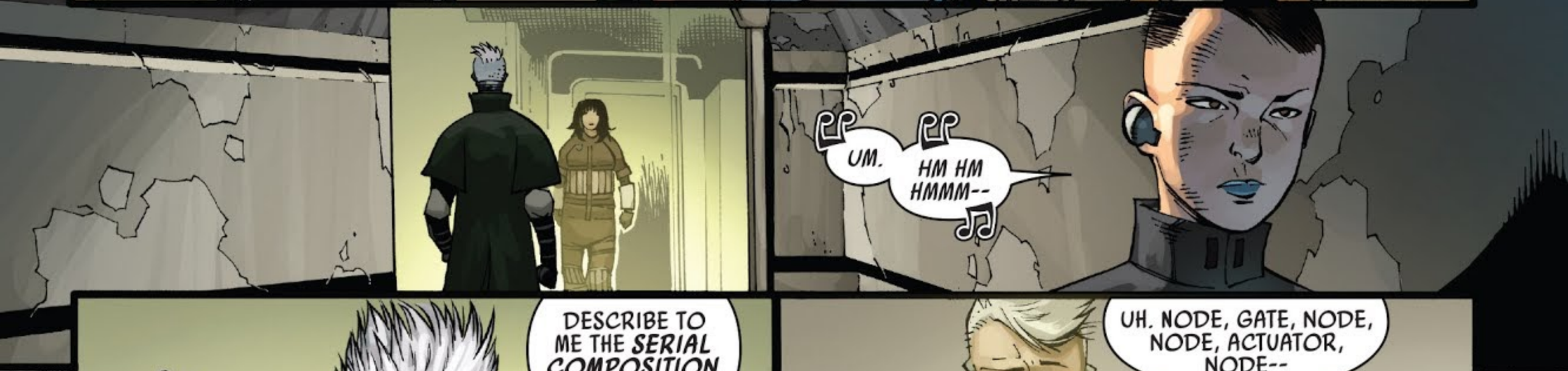
THE ABOMINATRIX KELKO DEV.
HOT.
I POSED AS HER DOUBLE TO FLUSH OUT TERRORISTS OPPOSING HER RULE.
DOCTOR CORNELIUS EVAZAN.
OOH-- I'VE HEARD OF THAT GUY.
USED ME AS A DISPLAY MODEL FOR HIS AESTHETIC BENEVOLENCE SURGERY.
SANDEWAR MANDEWAR. LEADER OF THE VEX CRUSADE, WHO--
OKAY, OKAY, I GET IT.
IT'S A WHO'S-MET-THE-MOST-EVIL-PEOPLE CONTEST, RIGHT? BECAUSE I'VE GOTTA WARN YA, I'VE GOT SOME REEEEAL DOOZIES ON MY RECO--
NO, THAT'S NOT IT.
DO YOU KNOW THE REAL REASON SHAPE-SHIFTERS KEEP THEMSELVES SECRET?

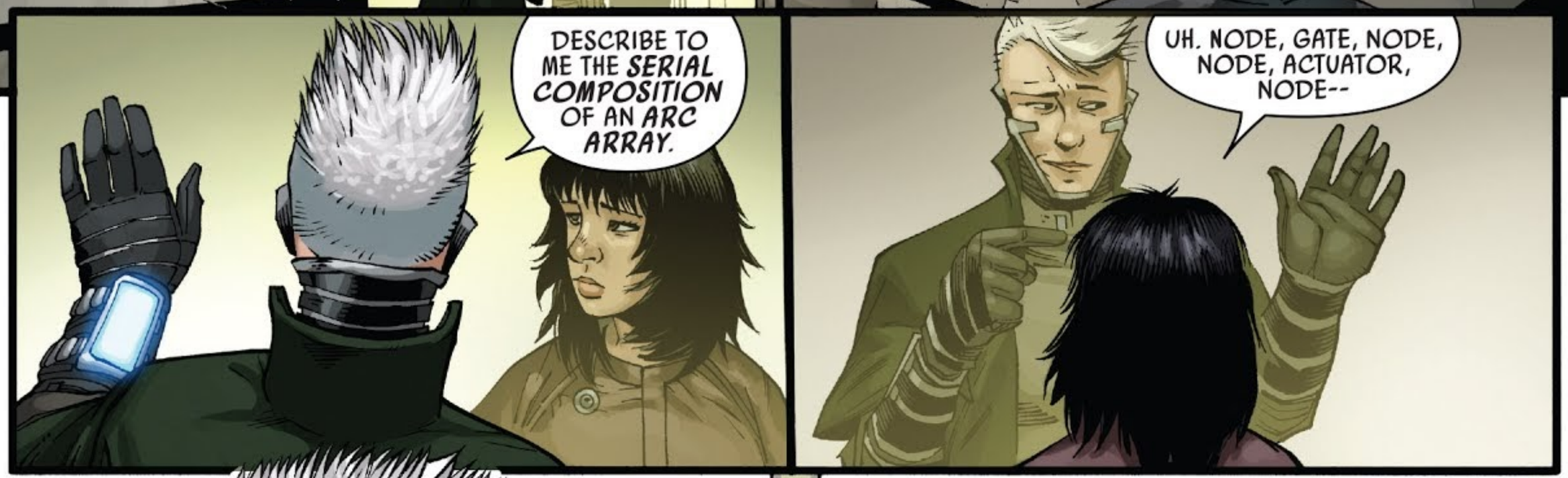
IT'S BECAUSE WE'RE USED TO BEING *USED*.
SELFISH MASTERS, BENEVOLENT MASTERS, MONSTROUS MASTERS--IT DOESN'T MATTER. THEY *ALL* SEE US AS A *RESOURCE* FIRST, AND *LIVING BEINGS* SECOND.
THOSE PEOPLE? THEY *ALL* STARTED OUT LOOKING AT ME THE WAY *YOU'RE* LOOKING AT ME NOW.
"EVIL'S JUST A MEASURE OF HOW MUCH *YOUR* CHOICES TAKE AWAY OTHER *PEOPLE'S*."
WHAT?
NOTHING. JUST, AH...
...SOMETHING MY *MOM* USED TO SAY.


Twelve Hours Later.
"I HOPE YOU WON'T THINK ME IMPOLITE, MA'AM-- BUT...WE WERE SOMEWHAT CONFUSED BY WORD OF YOUR ARRIVAL.
"HERE AT ACCRESKER WE HAVE THE MOST SOPHISTICATED INTERROGATION TECHNOLOGIES EVER DEVISED..."
WHY, FOR THIS VERY PRISONER WE ARE DEFROSTING A BOR OF THE MAIRAN-- ONE OF ONLY THREE IN IMPERIAL HANDS.
WITH RESPECT, WE FAIL TO SEE WHAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE, THAT WE CANNOT.
YOUR CONFUSION IS NOTED WITH DULL PREDICTABILITY, WARDEN.
"PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT WHATEVER TAWDRY GOSSIP YOUR MIND LEECH SCRAPES FROM THE PRISONER'S BRAIN--IT IS OF PRECISELY ZERO INTEREST TO ME.
"I HAPPEN TO KNOW THIS JAIL IS EN ROUTE TO THE BANDIT PURGES IN SENEX-JUVEX.
"THE PRISONER'S EXPERTISE IS REQUIRED IN AN OPEN INVESTIGATION. I CANNOT RISK HER DEATH IN ONE OF YOUR HAM-FISTED BATTLES BEFORE I HAVE EXPLOITED IT."
NOW, ASSUMING NEITHER REASON NOR RANK HAVE CURED YOUR CHRONIC CONFUSION, PLEASE KNOW THIS--
I AM NOT IN A GOOD MOOD. DO NOT QUESTION ME AGAIN.
TH-THIS WAY, INSPECTOR TOLVAN.

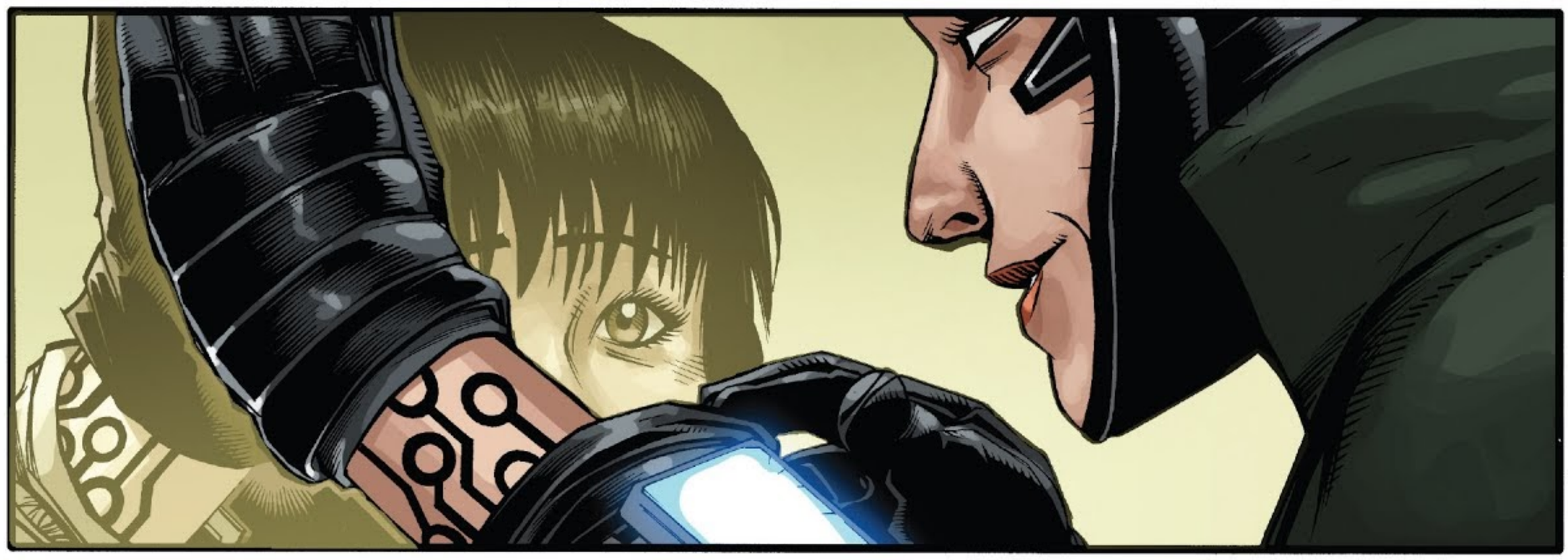

HM.
EVERYONE OUT.

UH...MA'AM? R-REGULATIONS.
"NO PRISONER WILL GO UNSUPERVISED BY CUSTODIAL PERSONNEL, AT ANY T--"
THEN YOU WILL FACE THE WALL AND HUM AUDIBLY TO AVOID CONTAMINATION WITH CLASSIFIED INFORMATION.


UM.
HM HM HMMM--


DESCRIBE TO ME THE SERIAL COMPOSITION OF AN ARC ARRAY.
UH. NODE, GATE, NODE, NODE, ACTUATOR, NODE--

I AM FURIOUS WITH YOU.
W-WHA--



FURIOUS.
ALSO, I DID MISS YOU.
KEEP TALKING, CONVICT FILTH!
NOW PAY ATTENTION.

HMM ♪ ♪ HMM HMMM HMM HM-HMMM...
...NODE, V-VIBRATION CRYSTAL, ACTUATOR, NODE...
"ALL RIGHT-- I GOT VISUAL ON ACCRESKER JAIL.

Twelve (More) Hours Later.

"LOOKS LIKE THE IMPS HIT A PIRATE STATION. PART OF THE ***BANDIT PURGES***, I BET.

"FLEET'S CRIPPLED ALL ITS ***WEAPONS***."

--BUT WHY BLOW IT ***UP*** WHEN YOU CAN RAM IT WITH A FLOATING JUNKHEAP OF IRREDEEMABLE ***SPACE TRASH*** AND KEEP THE LOOT FOR YOURSELF?

ENJOY THE PARTY, APHRA...

*HEY, STARROS--WHAT'S YOUR **DEAL** WITH THIS WOMAN, ANYWAY?*

...

LET ME ASK YOU SOMETHING, GENERAL.

DID YOU EVER CARE ABOUT SOMEONE ***SO MUCH*** IT SCARED YA, JUST TO ***THINK*** ABOUT THEM?

*LIKE--LIKE THERE'S THIS VULNERABLE **CHUNK** OF YOU, LITERALLY **WALKIN' AROUND**, SEPARATE FROM YOUR BODY, WHERE YOU CAN'T **PROTECT** IT.*

*PLUS-- **WORSE**-- YOU KNOW THAT IF IT **DOES** GET HURT, IT'S MOST LIKELY SOMETHING **YOU'VE** SAID OR DONE.*

BUT ***THEN?*** OHH, ***THEN!*** HAVING PUT ALL YOUR ***WEAKNESS*** IN THIS LITTLE ***BOX***, A-AND GOTTEN ***USED*** TO NOT ***WATCHING*** IT ALL THE TIME?

UP IT ***GETS***, THAT LITTLE ***BOX***, AND IT STABS YOU RIGHT THROUGH THE KIDNEYS, AND IT SETS FIRE TO YOUR ***TRUST*** AND JUST-- JUST JUMPS UP AND DOWN AND ***UP*** AND ***DOWN*** AND ***UP*** AND ***DOWN*** ON IT ***FOREVER***.

SMILING.

YOU EVER HAD THAT, MA'AM?
UH.
HA, NO-- I CAN SEE IT IN YOUR EYES. YOU'RE ALL ABOUT TRAGEDY, NOT TREACHERY. IT DON'T MATTER.
MEAN OLD GALAXY LIKE THIS? LOVE ONLY MEANS ONE THING:
FIREWORKS.

LOOK, WE NEED HER ALIVE, STARROS. IF THERE'S COMBAT OUT THERE SHE COULD BE IN TROUBLE. YOU NEED TO GET M--
AH, DON'T WORRY.
"IF I KNOW HER, SHE'S ALREADY FIGURED A WAY TO SLITHER OUT OF DANGER.
"AND EVEN IF NOT--
"--ALL YOU NEED'S A DECRYPTION CODE, FOR THAT INTEL, RIGHT?
S-STAY CLOSE TO ME, LOPSET.
ADVANCE!
"NOT LIKE SHE NEEDS ALL HER LIMBS FOR THAT."
IMPERIAL AUTHORITY CODE SIX-SIX-NINE-ZERO-BETA-ONE.

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EVENING, SIR. YOU LOOK ***WONDERFUL*** TONIGHT.

SKIP IT. THESE ***SENSOR DISRUPTORS*** WON'T LAST LONG. GET YOUR BUTTS UP HERE BEF--

JUSSSSSSTICE!

DISRUPTORS ARE OUT! WE'RE ***VISIBLE!*** HURRY!

I-IT'S THE ***GHOST!*** SWEET VOID, IT'S THE ***GHOST!***

NO, I--I ***KNOW*** THAT VOICE.

I THINK IT'S MY ***MOM.***

WEARING SOME...TOTALLY ***LAME*** CLOAK, STRAIGHT OUT OF ***MY BIG FUN JEDI PICTURE BOOK.***

THIS IS ***DUMB.*** I DON'T ***BUY*** IT.

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...SO?
"SO"? THE LEGENDS SAY EARLY JEDI FLEW THOSE THINGS! IT'S PROBABLY BEEN HERE CENTURIES!
THERE MIGHT BE RELICS IN IT. LIKE, SPOOKY, GHOSTLY FORCE-SENSITIVE RELICS!
AGAIN: SO?!
SO, THIS FIND MAY PROVE INSTRUCTIVE IN OUR BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF GALACTIC HISTORY, AND--
APHRA, FOR PITY'S SAKE!
I'M BEING SCANNED! I'M LITERALLY BEING SCANNED RIGHT NOW!
WE ARE GOING TO DIE AND MORE IMPORTANTLY THEY'LL TAKE MY MEDALS AND YOU ARE THE WORST CREATURE ALIVE AND YOU KNEW WE HAD A TINY WINDOW TO GET THIS DONE NOW STOP BEING AN IDIOT AND GET IN HERE RIGHT NOW!
IT MIGHT BE RRRREALLY VALUABLE.
BUT... BUT...

JUST-- ONE SECOND. KAY?
OH NO.
I'M IN LOVE WITH AN EVIL IDIOT.
To Be Continued!

DOCTOR APHRA
NEXT ISSUE:
A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away is a lot easier to get to than you think – and we want to hear from you! Write us at StarWars@Marvel.com if you want to make it onto a future letters page. Don't forget to mark your notes "OKAY TO PRINT."